

Towards a New Phase of Cooperation Between the American Marines and the French Army

WRITTEN BY MARIA GIOVANNA CARANFA

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The war in Ukraine has called into question the European and international security system, making the idea of military collaborations concrete, particularly between France and the United States. The two countries believe it is crucial to increase cooperation between the allies and implement European defence.

U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Francis F. Donovan invited the French Army Brig. Gen. Eric Ozanne (head of the 6th French Light Tank Brigade (LAB) for a visit to the 2nd American Navy Division (2ndMarDiv). In early March, Ozanne participated in a four-day visit of military installations along the East Coast, from the USMC Camp Lejeune (North Carolina) to the USS Kearsarge at Naval Air Station in Norfolk (Virginia). The purpose is to strengthen military and defence cooperation between France and the United States.

«We always trained very hard following the motto 'hard training, easy war,' but what we are currently doing is retraining ourselves to face an enemy with the same capacities as we have» (Delaporte, 2022).

Moreover, Gen. Ozanne has emphasized the similitude between the French Army and the American Marines, especially regarding the *modus operandi* and the amphibian characteristic, which represents the cornerstone of their relationship. The partnership between the 6th and 2nd MarDiv dates back to 2013, when USMC Commander James F. Amos, the French Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Bertrand Ract-Madoux, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to improve the relationship between the two services.

The Marines are currently engaged in the Phase III Infantry Battalion Experimental Campaign Plan, IBX30. The purpose is to evaluate the functionality of the Berger infantry battalion project. Support forces are units organised, trained, and equipped to destroy an opponent's plan. They are strategically placed where they can gather information, strike to close bottlenecks or rally opponents in favourable areas. These light and highly mobile forces will force the opponent to deal with a unit that previously would have been too small to consider. They can persist independently for days, if necessary, and can reposition themselves with organic mobility to avoid being targeted. Mobility, discretion and protection contribute to survival in a conflict. However, adequate training is needed to eliminate the bad habits adopted during counter-insurgency operations when the command was fixed to be more accessible.

The crux issue for both France and the United States is mobility, and there are three main reasons:

1. The enemy's ability to strike deep and the end of air superiority enjoyed in previous theatres;
2. The enemy's ability to use counter-mobility means and the need to retain some of the tactics;
3. The technological push of new equipment revolutionises the order of battle.

The 6th LAB is at the forefront of digital transformation: in 2023, it will be the first brigade to be fully modernised with next-generation Scorpion equipment.

«The Griffon [new infantry armoured vehicle – SICS [new Scorpion Information and C2 System] is a true success and provides our tactical command posts an unprecedented agility which revolutionises the tempo of manoeuvre» (Delaporte, 2022).

The return to a more infantry-focused approach is another meeting point between the French Army and the American Marines. Despite that, there are still differences. The French Army has decided to eliminate the multi-role characteristic of the brigades. The French troops are specialised in the three traditional segments: armoured (with VBCI and Leclerc), medium (with Grifone and the new Jaguar to be incorporated into the cavalry units for the first time this year) and light (also with Serval and Jaguar). Instead, Americans focus on lightness, agility and high technology.

If the current collaboration between the French-American amphibious twin units works well, both Ozanne and Donovan would like to implement it further up to the level of Chief of Staff. A perspective made possible by massive investments by both parties in new distributed simulation capabilities.

«These new capabilities are beneficial to develop high-intensity warfare tactics, especially when simulating large losses, but can only be used as a complement to live training» (Delaporte, 2022). Strengthening interoperability between the two armies is a real challenge. There are many things to consider: equipment, doctrine, and support. There are also many complications: language, for example, is the greatest obstacle.

«In combat or the field, you always go back to your native tongue. So one should not forget that the first barrier to interoperability is the ability to communicate in the same language» (Delaporte, 2022).

Regular training and mutual learning are fundamental. Maj. Gen. Donovan expressed his interest in learning more about the French organisational structure, where most of the differences reside.

«Based on our bilateral discussions during this visit, I would say the French way of commanding the troops is attracting interest in the sense that, contrary to U.S. bases which resemble large cities and where troops live rather dispersed, French soldiers live side by side daily» (Delaporte, 2022).

Brian D. Beaudreault, Lieutenant General of the Marine Corps and former commander of the 2nd MarDiv, agree with the need for greater integration and interdependence. Having been a strong advocate of bilateral rapprochement, he believes that a combined strength is imperative.

«I am thrilled to see the relationship continuing to mature, and I believe there is a reason for great optimism on further improving upon our interoperability (and interdependence) goals. The future outlook of this combined force capability is bright and will prove to be a strong deterrent force. Should deterrence fail, 6th LAB and 2d MARDIV fighting under a consolidated C2 construct is a force that is ready to fight and win while operating side by side» (Delaporte, 2022).

The weeks, months and years ahead could show a total transformation in how the United States and its NATO allies deal with defence and deterrence in Europe.

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